

Artists

Sabri Moudallal: Born in Aleppo in 1918, highly esteemed by native Aleppians but scarcely known beyond the city limits, he has almost always lived outside the "star system". His talent was revealed relatively late on in life, from the seventies on, when he gave a series of concerts in Paris with his group of the time, a vocal quartet known as "The Muezzins of Aleppo". Ever since then he has received constant requests from abroad, has been appointed principal muezzin of the city. Sabri Moudallal is one of Syria's greatest vocal artists, with a prodigious output as a composer. He has taken the art of the flourish to its highest degree, even developing a vocal technique enabling him to take his breath whilst singing. Although he remains a faithful adept of the sacred song, he is equally at home in the secular repertory. In spite of his great age, he is still pursuing his career. He was a pupil of Umar al-Batsch himself, and his great specialty is now the wasla, of which he is a true master in every aspect, down to the most minute detail. Like his master he has also put his hand and skill to composition in the traditional style.

Farid Al-Atrash:

He was born in a village near Swaida in southern Syria. In the mid 1920s he moved to Cairo, Egypt with his mother, brother and sister, Asmahan. During his late school years, Farid showed increasing interest in music and singing. He later had the chance to get in touch with some famous Arab composers like Riyad al-Sonbati and Farid Ghosn. He soon published his first self-composed songs which included "Ya Zahratan Fi Khayali" and "Ya Raitni Tayr". Farid also entered the world of cinema, he was the star of many Egyptian movies like "Intisar al-Shabab", "Gharam wa Intiqam" and "Lahn al-Kholoud". Farid died in Beirut, Lebanon in 1974.

Asmahan
(1918-1944):

Syrian singer and actor. Sister of Farid al-Atrash, a famous singer too, and a member of the famous Atrash family known for its role in the resistance against the French mandate in the 1920s. Asmahan lived started her career in Syria and Lebanon, then traveled to Cairo, Egypt where she cooperated with many famous composers like Riyadh al-Sombati and Mohammed al-Qasabji . Her films include 'intisar echabab' and 'garam wentikam'.

Dureid
Lahham:

Perhaps the most famous Syrian comedian. He was born in Damascus in 1945, and studied Chemistry at the University of Damascus. He is especially famous for the comedian character of Gawar el-Tosheh, which he performed in the 1970s hit TV series of Hammam al-Hana. In the 1980s he performed plays of the political critique Mohammad al-Maghout, they included Kasak ya Watan (Toast of the Nation) and Gorbeh (Estrangement). His recent TV performances include Ahlam Abul Hana (Dreams of Abul Hana) and Awdat Gawar (The return of Gawar). In 1999, Laham was assigned as a UNICEF ambassador to the Middle East and North Africa. Following are some of the famous TV sketches he performed in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
Alameh Al Aghawani (1909-1982):

Was one of the most famous Syrian comedians in the late 1940s and the 1950s. He was working as a truck driver when his first song, about the life of drivers, achieved great success and popularity. Aghawani later became famous for his songs which used simple lyrics and tunes to express sarcasm about political, economic and social issues, a music style known in Syria and the Arab World as 'monologue'. The

following are some of his clips, dating back to 1952.

Sabah Fakhri:

Is the most famous performer of the traditional qudood and muwashahat music types. He was born in Aleppo to a conservative family. He was enrolled into to the Academy of Arabic Music of Aleppo then to the Academy of Damascus, from which he graduated in 1948. Then in Cairo, Egypt, he studied under the music masters of that time, and since then he started performing concerts in Syria. He soon became famous all over the Arab World. He also performed many concerts in Europe and the Americas. His name is enshrined in the Guinness Book of Records for his prowess in Caracas, where he sang for 10 hours without a pause.
Nizar Qabbani (1923-1998):

Syrian poet and diplomat whose subject matter, at first strictly romantic, grew to embrace political issues as well. Written in simple but eloquent language, his verses, some of which were set to music, won the hearts of countless Arabic speakers throughout the Arab World. Qabbani, who was born into a middle-class merchant family, was also the grandnephew of the pioneering Arab playwright Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani. He studied law at the University of Damascus (graduated in 1945), then began his varied career as a diplomat. He served in the Syrian embassies in Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Britain, China, and Spain before retiring in 1966 and moving to Beirut, Lebanon, where he founded the Manshurat Nizar Qabbani, a publishing company. Meanwhile, he also wrote much poetry, at first in classic forms, then in free verse, which he helped establish in modern Arabic poetry. His poetic language is noted for capturing the rhythms of everyday Syrian speech.

The suicide of his sister, who was unwilling to marry a man she did not love, had a profound effect on Qabbani, and much of his poetry concerns the experiences of women in traditional Arab society. Verses on the beauty and desirability of women filled Qabbani's first four collections. Qasa'id min Nizar Qabbani (1956; "Poems by Nizar Qabbani") was a turning point in his art; in it he expressed resentment of male chauvinism. It also included his famed "Bread, Hashish and Moon," a harsh attack on weak, impoverished societies that live in a haze of fantasies. Thereafter, he often wrote from a woman's viewpoint and advocated social freedoms for women. His Hawamish 'Ala daftar al-naksa (1967; "Marginal Notes on the Book of Defeat") was a stinging critique of unrealistic Arab leadership during the Six-Day War with Israel. Among his more than 20 poetry collections, the most noted volumes are Habibati (1961; "My Beloved") and Al-rasm bi-al-kalimat (1966; "Drawing with Words"). Qasa'id hubb 'Arabiyah ("Arabian Love Poems") was published in 1993.